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Fresh Thyme to move HQ to Downers Grove

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A rendering of a Fresh Thyme Farmers Market

An organic grocer that plans an ambitious expansion across the Midwest has inked deals for two more Chicago-area stores as it prepares to move its headquarters to Downers Grove from Phoenix.

As its expansion ramps up, the grocer will shift its headquarters this spring to southwest suburban Downers Grove, bringing about 100 corporate and management jobs, Sherrell said. Fresh Thyme leased 30,000 square feet in the Corridors III building at 2650 Warrenville Road for the new office.

The headquarters move will allow the firm to stay close to Midwestern markets, where it hopes to open 100 stores over the next six years, including 18 in Chicago and the suburbs, Sherrell said. A spokesman for Atlanta-based Columbia Property Trust, which owns the 222,000-square-foot office building, confirmed the lease but declined to comment further.

**CHANGING FOOD LANDSCAPE**

Backed by executives at Michigan retail behemoth Meijer, Fresh Thyme is part of a new wave of companies [**transforming**](http://www.chicagobusiness.com/realestate/20130916/CRED02/130919857) the local grocery landscape.

Along with [**Plum Market**](http://www.chicagobusiness.com/realestate/20120525/CRED03/120529822/specialty-grocer-chooses-old-town-for-first-chicago-store) and [**Mrs. Green's Natural Market,**](http://www.chicagorealestatedaily.com/article/20130501/CRED03/130439942/east-coast-grocer-to-open-in-lincoln-park-hospital-redevelopment) Fresh Thyme caters to health-minded shoppers by offering big selections of natural and organic food. [**Whole Foods Market**](http://www.chicagobusiness.com/article/20150114/NEWS12/150119910/whole-foods-getting-new-lakeview-digs-official-says-its-on) and **[Mariano's,](http://www.chicagobusiness.com/article/20140607/ISSUE01/306079985/can-marianos-expansion-binge-save-roundys)** meanwhile, are aggressively moving to protect and boost their market share, and Trader Joe's has [**opened stores**](http://www.chicagobusiness.com/article/20140107/NEWS07/140109920/trader-joes-coming-to-schaumburg) as well.

“I think there will be some strong and stiff competition with, let's say, the Whole Foods of the world, but I think the real siphoning is going to be from the remaining players in the middle market,” including Jewel-Osco and independent grocers, said Mari Gallagher, principal at Mari Gallagher Research & Consulting Group, a Chicago-based food consulting firm.

**WILL COMPETE ON PRICE**

Sherrell, who once operated a Phoenix-based natural food chain called Sunflower Farmers Market, said his firm will differentiate itself by competing on price.

“We're a natural, organic specialty store and we've got a unique mix,” he said, noting Fresh Thyme carries conventional food in addition to organic items. “We bring that to the public as a value.”